

January 14, 1999



OFFICE OF THE
ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF TEXAS

— * —
JOHN CORNYN
Attorney General

— * —
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas
78711-2548
(512) 463-2100
www.oag.state.tx.us

Ms. Jennifer Soldano
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR99-0110

Dear Ms. Soldano:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 121242.

The Texas Department of Transportation received two requests for information about property located at 1416 Eighth Street and 1415 Seventh Street in Wichita Falls, Texas and the elevated highway project along U.S. Highway 287/82. You state that you will make public certain documents which describe the highway project. You contend that the remaining requested documents are excepted from disclosure pursuant to sections 552.103 and 552.105 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed a representative sample of the documents at issue.¹

Section 552.105 excepts from disclosure information relating to:

- (1) the location of real or personal property for a public purpose prior to public announcement of the project; or
- (2) appraisals or purchase price of real or personal property for a public purpose prior to the formal award of contracts for the property.

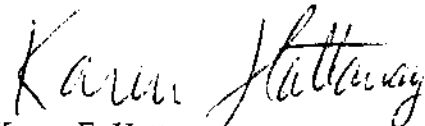
¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

Section 552.105 is designed to protect a governmental body's planning and negotiating position with regard to particular transactions. Open Records Decision Nos. 564 (1990), 357 (1982), 310 (1982). Because this exception extends to "information pertaining to" the location, appraisals, and purchase price of property, it may protect more than a specific appraisal report prepared for a specific piece of property. Open Records Decision No. 564 at 2 (1990). For example, this office has concluded that appraisal information about parcels of land acquired in advance of others to be acquired for the same project could be withheld where this information would harm the governmental body's negotiating position with respect to the remaining parcels. *Id.* A governmental body may withhold information "which, if released, would impair or tend to impair [its] 'planning and negotiating position in regard to particular transactions.'" Open Records Decision No. 357 at 3 (1982) (quoting Open Records Decision No. 222 (1979)). Information excepted from disclosure under section 552.105 may be withheld so long as the transaction is not complete. Open Records Decision No. 310 (1982).

You explain that "[t]he department is in the process of acquiring, as right of way, a segment of a highway project along U.S. Hwy 287/82." You inform us that the department is in the process of purchasing the two parcels about which the requestors are seeking information. You state that releasing the information at issue "would in all likelihood not only adversely affect the department's current negotiation efforts to amicably purchase the property but would also have the potential of adversely affecting the department's litigation position for those unacquired parcels of property." Under these circumstances, we conclude that the department may withhold the information at issue from disclosure under section 552.105 at this time.

Because we are able to resolve this matter under section 552.105, we do not address your additional arguments against disclosure. We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have questions about this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Karen E. Hattaway
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KEH/ch

Ref: ID# 121242

Enclosures: Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Harold White
Banner, Briley & White, L.L.P.
4245 Kemp Boulevard, Suite 200
Bank One Tower
Wichita Falls, Texas 76308
(w/o enclosures)

Ms. Le Templar, Staff Writer
Times Record News
P.O. Box 120
Wichita Falls, Texas 76307-0120
(w/o enclosures)